

The Archives of the State of Hawaii

By ELIZABETH H. WRAY *

Archives of Hawaii

THE STATE OF HAWAII is fortunate in having a long history of concern and care for its archives. Holdings of the Public Archives include the records of the Hawaiian Kingdom, the Provisional Government, the Republic, and the Territory. Among the last are files of most of the Delegates to the United States Congress. Unlike our sister State of Alaska, many of whose Territorial records were accessioned by the Federal Government prior to statehood, Hawaii has retained unbroken physical custody of its archives from the time of annexation in 1898. Part of an agreement made shortly afterwards was that Hawaii would provide a specially built fireproof building for its archives. This was completed in 1906. In 1954 a larger building replaced the earlier one, which had become inadequate. As a part of the Hawaii Omnibus Bill, presented to the second session of the 86th Congress (S. 3054; H.R. 10443 and 11602) the General Services Administration has proposed legislation to transfer to the State of Hawaii title to the noncurrent and current records related to functions assumed by the State. The bill would also confirm to the State the holdings now in the Public Archives.

Throughout the Territorial period control of the Public Archives was vested in a Board of Commissioners, whose members were the Secretary of the Territory as chairman ex officio and two citizens appointed by the Governor for an indefinite term of office. Commissioners received no salary, but all their expenses were paid by the government.

Hawaii has had a long history of responsible self-government. Only the offices of the Governor and the Secretary were directly under the Federal Government. Hawaii has had its own courts and prison system and has managed such functions as administration and control of public lands, highways, public works, airports, fish and game, forest resources, and agriculture. A merit system

*The author, who is Assistant Archivist of Hawaii, wishes to acknowledge the advice of State Archivist Agnes C. Conrad in the preparation of her paper. A sketch of the Hawaiian archives was published in this journal some years ago: Jason Horn, "The Archives of Hawaii," in *American Archivist*, 16:105-114 (Apr. 1953).

comptroller is the head of this department. Generally speaking, the Archives hopes to gain by being part of a larger agency and does not foresee too many administrative problems. Certain legal problems, however, will probably need attention in future legislative sessions.

Under the Hawaiian Organic Act, which established a territorial form of government, the Secretary of Hawaii was designated as the official to record and preserve all the laws and proceedings of the legislature and all acts and proceedings of the Governor. This office was abolished by the new constitution, and the Lieutenant Governor was designated to assume its functions. Compliance with the law has been maintained—to the advantage of the Archives. The secretary “kept” the records for which he was responsible by depositing them in the Archives, of which he was legally the executive officer and chairman of the board. The Archivist was empowered to certify copies of these records. Now that the Archives is under the comptroller, the questions of custody and certification must be resolved. It is probable that some form of legislation will be needed to clarify these issues.

The records management program had been under the Archives, but the power to approve destruction of government records had rested in a disposal committee, which acted on the recommendation of the Archivist. It was composed of the Lieutenant Governor (replacing the secretary), the attorney general, and the comptroller. The reorganization bill not only transferred the Archives to the Department of Accounting and General Services, but specifically abolished the disposal committee and gave the comptroller its power as well! The type of legislation that will amend this in order to guarantee historic and legal (as well as fiscal) evaluation of the records is currently under study.

In addition to legal problems a number of operational ones may have a direct impact on the records management program and possibly on archival management. The reorganization act dissolved several existing departments and assigned their functions and personnel to new ones. Decisions on storage, disposal, and accessioning of records would seem to be logical adjuncts to reorganization, but to what extent the program can keep up with the actual physical transfer of equipment, personnel, and functions, is impossible to say at present.

Most of the departments have been utilizing a schedule for standard fiscal and administrative forms for over a year, but only five departments have been completely inventoried and scheduled for nonstandard records. The National Archives and Records

Service made the services of James Odell available to the Archives of Hawaii for a two-month period late in 1958. The six largest agencies were chosen for attention because previous inspection and consultation indicated that they had both the greatest amount of records and the largest staffs. Those covered were Agriculture and Forestry, Health, Institutions, Public Instruction, Public Works and Highways, and the Tax Department. The resultant schedules have been in effect only a year. Two more will be completed soon. Analysis shows that only one of these seven schedules, that for the Tax Department, will be unaffected by reorganization. One will be split and the two parts will be added to two other schedules in the original six. Of the rest, two may be expanded easily to include newly assigned functions. From one will be eliminated sections covering functions transferred to another department. The others will form composites with functions not yet covered. Initially it is planned to complete records control for the newly created departments. Fortunately, the old agencies whose records have been scheduled completely are primarily the ones to be least affected by reorganization.

The effect of the reorganization act on the records program of the Archives is well illustrated by the plans for what will eventually be a Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources. It is a two-step plan for land, natural resources, agriculture, and conservation. As illustrated by the accompanying charts,³ effectuation is expected to be accomplished in two stages. By February 17, 1960 (the first day of the legislative session), the functions of nine agencies must be consolidated into two. By July 1, 1962, the functions of the two new departments must be consolidated into one. Furthermore, the functions of the Fair Commission (which operates a golf course and plans fairs) are split between the new Department of Land and Natural Resources and the new Department of Economic Development. On September 1, 1960, however, the golf course is to be transferred to the City and County of Honolulu. Thus, agencies that are now independent will become bureaus and divisions or will be completely absorbed by other bureaus and lose all identity.

Records control schedules have been completed for the agencies listed in Chart 2. Of those in Chart 1, only the Division of State Parks is covered for both standard forms and unique records; water resources is covered for standard forms only; and no schedules have been prepared for the other agencies. With the reorganization, all

³ Legislative Reference Bureau, University of Hawaii, *A Summary of the Hawaii State Government Reorganization Act of 1959* (Honolulu, Nov. 18, 1959).

CHART I

ORGANIZATION FOR ADMINISTRATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES
STATE OF HAWAII

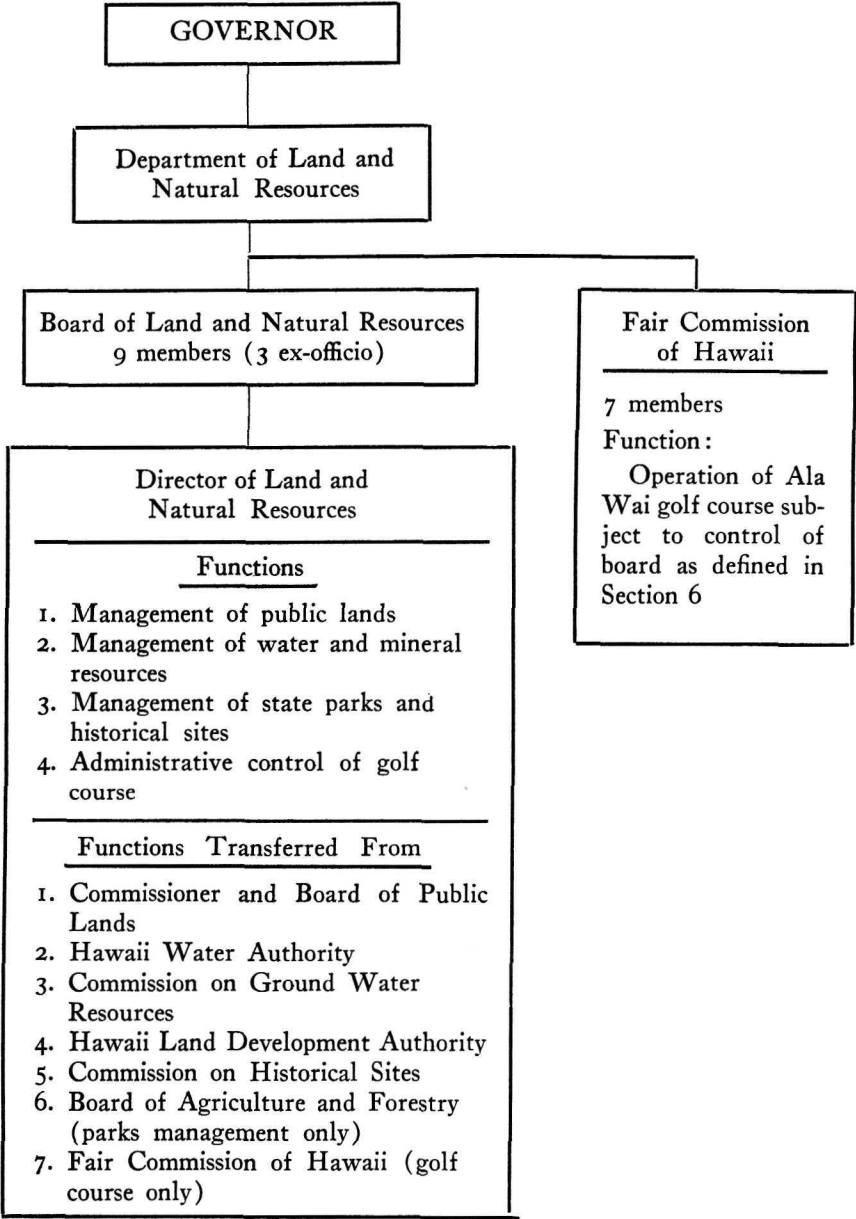
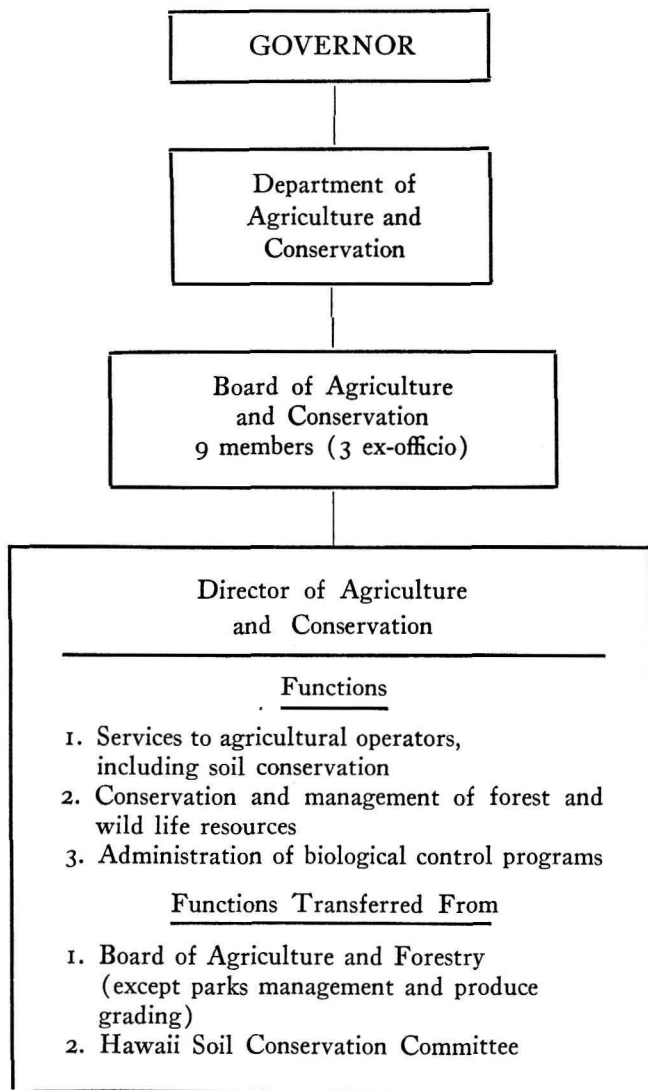


CHART 2

ORGANIZATION FOR AGRICULTURE AND CONSERVATION ADMINISTRATION
STATE OF HAWAII

of the schedules that have been completed will have to be reviewed in the light of changes in reporting methods, changes in policy-making levels, and consolidation of administrative records. Schedules for functions not already covered will have to be created.

Possibly the most spectacular accomplishment of reorganization from the standpoint of archivists and records managers will be the consolidation of administrative control over 27 regulatory boards and commissions. In the past, each has been completely autonomous and many records were poorly maintained in small offices or private homes. Frequently the records followed the secretary or chairman instead of staying in one location. Occasionally records even disappeared into nongovernmental custody. Replevin has never been resorted to in the past and probably will not be in the future, but the mere fact that one department head will administer all 27 agencies should introduce controls not formerly in existence.

Ideally, from the archival point of view, if all permanent records could have been transferred to the Archives at the time actual reorganization occurred, the hierarchical divisions of the records of the Territorial Government could be preserved intact. Such a coincidence of chronological and jurisdictional cutting off of files is, however, impracticable. A certain amount of merging, splitting, and interfiling is bound to occur. But, if the Archives had extended authority to control all phases of records management, the integrity of the permanent records could be protected by a combination of improved filing methods, records storage, microfilming, and accessioning. The Archives has never had other than advisory control over the creation and maintenance of records. As part of a large staff agency which includes data processing, systems control, purchasing, and related services, there is every reason to hope that it can make records management a full-fledged reality.

There is considerable interest in establishing a records storage center, and the 1960 legislature has authorized the funds needed for a modest beginning. Shelving will be installed in the basement of the Archives Building to accommodate some 3,000 cubic feet of records. The present staff members can service these records besides carrying on their regular duties in the Archives proper. An estimated 4,000 cubic feet of records that could be transferred immediately have been identified.

The Archives was granted funds to set up a central microfilming service by the spring session of the 1959 legislature. This service went into full production this year with the filming of the records of the First Circuit Court.

In summary, statehood and the beginning of a new decade find the Archives of Hawaii in a relatively favorable position. It has a new building containing facilities for future expansion. It is already launched on a records control program which includes microfilming as a space-saving device. The 1960 legislative session granted the necessary funds for establishing the nucleus of a records center. It is not unreasonable to expect that control schedules for the records of all reorganized departments will become a reality in two or three years and that a start will be made on microfilming for security. A sizable volume of records will be destroyed, and innovations in filing systems will expedite the program. The new department head (the comptroller) favors the expansion of the two programs of archival management and records management, and his authority to issue rules and regulations having the force and effect of law should strengthen the program. If the experience of the National Archives and Records Service is repeated for the Archives of Hawaii, the newest State will have a valuable tool for the conduct of government as well as a historical treasure for its citizenry.

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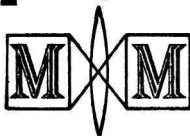
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